The question was simple: Is a nine-story building historically appropriate in the midst of a commercial district characterized by two- and three-story buildings? Only two out of Bethlehem’s City Council members tackled this question head on, the others breezed by it and spoke instead about visions of “economic development” and “getting people downtown.” This flew in the face of the legal advice they’d just been given by the council solicitor (to focus their vote on historic appropriateness), and it showed a dramatic disregard for the residents and business owners who spoke to the value of the historic conservation district that includes the corner of Fourth and Vine Streets.

It also represents a troubling break from the community revitalization strategies that have served the city so well. “For over 40 years, Bethlehem has leveraged its historic assets to create jobs, attract tourist spending and generate tax revenues” (Historic Streets. The value of the historic conservation district that includes the corner of Fourth and Vine Streets.

Karen Beck Pooley
Bethlehem

Letters to the Editor

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1. Your comments: Should N.Y. grand jury have charged officer in chokehold death?
   (http://www.lehighvalleylive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2014/12/your_comments_new_york_grand_j.html)
   (121 comments)

2. Stepmother sexually assaulted Jessica Padgett’s body after killing her, prosecutor says
   (6 comments)

3. Phillipsburg tree lighting ceremony in Shuppell Park (photos)
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4. Lehigh Valley unemployment rate drops to lowest level since 2008
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Uncle Remus Ox, move to Bethlehem where history and architecture are equally important to the community!
Density allows for sustainable and walkable communities. With greater density, residents are able to walk to amenities in their neighborhoods and public transit becomes more efficient. High rise buildings such as this are more efficient than low rise buildings. In addition, a high rise allows us to keep open space where it is needed (and belongs) and avoid suburban-style sprawl in our urban cores. I believe the building design has taken into consideration the height, by having step backs as the building ascends. If we never allow buildings in our urban cores to be higher than 2-3 stories, that would defeat the purpose of having urban cores where there is sufficient density to create sustainable, walkable, and livable neighborhoods. Let’s continue to add density to Bethlehem’s 2 downtowns and make them both great places to live/work/play.

Increasing density also comes with its set of problems including traffic, increased pollution, higher crime, and in this case the project does not seem to be an alternative to urban sprawl.

You say that increased density allows people to walk to amenities. The writer points out that the area where this project is proposed is already the most densely populated in Bethlehem. Cannot those people already there walk to neighborhood amenities?

Your arguments are full of holes, much like Swiss cheese.

Would it be okay for a developer to purchase a building next to the Moravian Book Shop, raze it, and then build a nine story edifice in its place?

I think not, yet it’s alright to do that in the poor old south side of the city.